

Opera

Cendrillon

RAM, NW1

★★★★☆

It was a former opera critic of this newspaper who said that listening to Massenet was like visiting a brothel: enjoyable at the time but there's a certain amount of guilt afterwards. Massenet's *Cendrillon* is a case in point. All those luscious, full-fat harmonies, glittery orchestration and syrupy duets — you wallow happily and later feel like purging.

The Royal Academy is sticking its neck out in mounting the opera (which follows Covent Garden's star-spangled staging in 2011). The gamble is worth it for the voices. Leading the first cast, Cathy-Di Zhang is beautifully affecting as Cinders, or Lucette as she is in this telling. Zhang's silvery tone is shiveringly transporting, her phrasing natural and graceful, and so is her musicality — here is a soprano unafraid to let you focus in as she scales back for a rapt pianissimo.

I liked the gutsiness of many of the others, too: the Academy opts for a tenor Prince Charming, not a mezzo, which defangs the opera of some of its camp. Richard Dowling's student prince (black poloneck, leather jacket) is hardly macho, though, and the two make a nice pair in their moreish duets; Dowling even floats a few notes in *voix mixte*, the *je ne sais quoi* of French tenor singing. Rozanna Madylus bites into the contralto barks of gorgon stepmother Madame de la Haltière with gusto too. Ed Ballard's Pandolfe is bumpier and I'm not sure the coloratura frenzies of the Fairy (Godmother) are Tereza Gevorgyan's forte.

No one is really helped by the jumble of periods, costumes and wacky ensembles concocted by director Christopher Cowell. None of it is fatal, but it's neither particularly winsome nor witty. Best to cling to those melodies, lovingly shaped in the pit by Gareth Hancock. Guilt can wait.

Neil Fisher

Box office: 020-7873 7300, to Nov 25



No artifice and he even looked like he might be enjoying himself

News flash: Bob plays the crowd

At last, Dylan considers his fans, says Will Hodgkinson — and it pays off

Pop

Bob Dylan

Clyde Auditorium, Glasgow

★★★★★

Bob Dylan is famous for confounding his audiences, hiding at stage left when they want him out front; making songs unrecognisable when they want to hear the melodies; being maddeningly elusive when they think they have a handle on him. This time he confounded his audience again, but by demonstrating all the qualities that made people fall in love with his music in the first place.

In a wide-brimmed fedora and mariachi suit, before a five-piece band that stuck to a slinky bar-room blues style, Dylan took centre stage and sang *Positively 4th Street*, not so much mangling its melody as maturing it, his

sandpaper voice blending with harmonica playing that was sensual and textured. For *Duquesne Whistle*, the lead single from his 2012 album *Tempest*, he stood by a grand piano, leaning into it as he pulled on the mythic spirit of American history with the song's train-like, early rock'n'roll feel. He even looked like he might be enjoying himself.

Also from *Tempest* was *Pay in Blood*, in which Dylan came across like a hellfire preacher spouting nonsensical verse that somehow rang true. "I've been through hell. What good did it do? My conscience is clear. What about you?" he croaked, and it was completely convincing. The limitations of his voice have been turned into techniques: he jumped from low to high notes and sang in a rough, weathered style that reduced his status as the great singer-songwriter — since the words were often unintelligible — and put emphasis on effect instead. He also paid homage to the blues and country artists that have gone before him: *High Water Everywhere*, from *Love and Theft*, was an ominous blues based on a song by the country blues pioneer Charley Patton.

Dylan eradicated all recognisable melody from *Tangled Up in Blue* and replaced it with a rising pitch and a pentatonic piano sequence, but the song's epic romantic quality, both intimate and universal, remained, making it as affecting as ever. *Simple Twist of Fate* was emotional too; filled with feeling, there was no artifice to Dylan's newly realised rendition of a song he must have performed hundreds of times before.

He even spoke — although only to say that he and the band were taking a small break. An encore of *All Along the Watchtower*, which he sang like a teenager whose voice was breaking, managed to be both subdued and celebratory, while *Blowing in the Wind* was transformed into a lolling waltz and was no less heartfelt for it. A moving concert, and another chapter in Dylan's life of restlessness and creativity. **Clyde Auditorium, tonight; Blackpool Opera House, Fri-Sun; Albert Hall, London, Nov 26-28**

Concert

Maxim Vengerov

Barbican

★★★★☆

After the Gergiev incidents, it's cheering to find a world-famous Russian musician appearing at the Barbican without attracting a protest. And who could possibly object to the violinist Maxim Vengerov? His grin alone continues to invite audiences to enjoy his art and since he returned from his long sabbatical that art has developed new outlets. Vengerov doesn't only fiddle, he also conducts. Tuesday's concert, his first in the Barbican's winter Artist Spotlight series, found him with the Polish Chamber Orchestra, steered along by occasional thrusts whenever a hand was spare.

In truth they needed more prodding, especially in Mozart's Fourth and Fifth Violin Concertos, sluggishly dispatched in murky tones. Vengerov himself, alas, was not much livelier. Where was the old careless rapture, the twinkle, the fire? Gone with his youth, it seemed, though we caught glimpses during his solo flights in the Fifth. Sweetness of tone, a dash of brio: welcome guests in performances that made these concertos last an age.

Nor did Vengerov Mark 2 markedly improve in the Tchaikovsky novelties of the second half, though it wasn't always his fault. The *Souvenir d'un lieu cher* condemned him at times to the violin's depths, not a place for soul singing; the material sounded much better on the cellos. Still, the orchestra brightened at least.

And then the stiff and dutiful Vengerov did too. It took the encores to relax him. Both were Saint-Saëns warhorses, both delivered with vim and a sense of enjoyment sorely missed before. The *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* flew by brightly, but the peach was the *Havanaise*, smoky and slithery, every phrase alive and personable. All was not lost.

Geoff Brown

Dance

Stuttgart Ballet

Sadler's Wells

★★★★☆

The Stuttgart Ballet has a long reputation for nurturing dance-makers from the company's own ranks, including now-stellar names such as John Neumeier, Jiri Kylián and William Forsythe. This policy was kick-started in the 1960s by its former artistic director John Cranko.

Last seen in London in 2008, Stuttgart Ballet is back with Cranko's 1969 take on *The Taming of the Shrew* on Friday and Saturday. First, however, was *Made in Germany*, a massive, gala-like parade of 13 short dance pieces, almost half of which were UK premieres. Lasting close to three hours and encompassing work stretching across nearly half a century, the night could hardly be faulted in terms of ambition, variety and talent. Reid Anderson, the company's current head honcho, has maintained high performance standards. His dancers are tremendous, the women tending to be quick and exceptionally wiry and

the men physically expressive. Shame then about some of the choreography.

A case in point is Marco Goecke, represented by a pair of excessively twitchy, bare-chested male solos set, respectively, to vocals by the great Sarah Vaughan and three Johnny Cash tracks. The arbitrary ticks and neurotic quirks of Goecke's style, plus his use of popular music, infects the work of fellow resident choreographer Demis Volpi, whose duet *Little Monsters* was a sleeker exercise in love and loss built around three Elvis Presley standards.

Although I found some of Anderson's recent repertory choices problematic, by slotting in three of Cranko's works (including a swoony pas de deux from *Romeo and Juliet*) and a passionately melodramatic duet from Neumeier's *The Lady of the Camellias*, he offered audiences a valuable reflection on the changing nature of ballet aesthetics. And always there was the pleasure of watching dancers at the top of their game.

Donald Hutera

Box office: 0844 8710090

Concert

Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival

Various venues, Huddersfield

★★★★☆

Specs appeal: Alicia Amatriain and Jason Reilly in Stuttgart Ballet's *Made in Germany*



Come to the edge!" exhorted Christopher Logue in one of his poems. And so we do, every year, at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. What other event would feature musicians playing in the dark, bus an audience at 10pm to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, or ask the hallowed BBC Singers to pronounce the word "f***" about 20 times?

The four letters appeared during Saturday's St Paul's Hall premiere of Norwegian composer Cecilie Ore's *Come to the Edge!*, where Logue's lines pepper a collage of texts about free speech. Prompted by the Pussy Riot trial in Moscow, the work achieved decent eloquence, anger too, though I found greater sustenance note for note in Charlotte Seither's *Haut Terrain* and Bent Sorensen's *Und die Sonne geht Unter*. The BBC Singers, with Nicholas Kok conducting, stayed unflappable throughout.

Ore's concern for political relevance also emerged in a video-enhanced version of her *A - a Shadow Opera*, a 50-minute opera of words and metallic bongs conveyed through loudspeakers, without any live performers. The letter A stands for Agamemnon; the words, projected on to wraparound walls at the

Sculpture Park's Longside Gallery, speak of war, death and power across the centuries. The point of the exercise was still made well before finishing time.

On Saturday night the Town Hall housed the 60-minute *In Vain* by the Austrian Georg Friedrich Haas. Haas is of the spectral school, where music is built from timbres, aural resonances and oscillations; he especially favours microtones, audible when a solid pitch melts. In Emilio Pomarico's UK premiere with the London Sinfonietta, chunks had enough magic to prove that Simon Rattle wasn't talking complete nonsense when he called the piece "one of the first great masterpieces of the 21st century".

If tunes are in short supply in Huddersfield, virtuosity isn't. The Arditti Quartet winningly slithered through richly textured quartets by Héctor Parra, the festival's composer-in-residence. The Red Note Ensemble punched out James Dillon's stimulating *New York Triptych*. Ensemble Linea couldn't save James Clarke's obdurate *2013-V*, but they bewitched us in *Liber Scintillarum* — a work by Brian Ferneyhough that actually manages to be fun.

Geoff Brown

Box office: 01484 430528, to Sun